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ASIATIC ART
Indian Sculpture
Gallery Book II: Detail
Room A 3

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

BOSTON

II

GALLERY BOOK

Department of Asiatic Art

INDIAN SCULPTURE
(Detailed Description)

I

INTRODUCTION

NOTE ON PRONUNCIATION

In Sanskrit and related Indian languages the vowels are pronounced as follows:

a, as in America (never like a in man)
ā, as in father
ai, as in aisle
e, as in effort
ē, as in prey
i, as in sit
ī, as in ravine
o, as in not
ō, as in note
u, as in pull
ū, as in lute

In the case of "e" and "o" the values are often omitted, as they are always long in Sanskrit.

The difference between a short and a long vowel (e.g. "a" and "ā") results from duration of utterance rather than from any change in sound. Accent (stress) is much less marked than in English, and is better avoided; final syllables should not be cut short.

The consonants are in general pronounced as in English; but "c" is like ch in church; "h" before a consonant like ch in loch; "ṅ" or "ṁ" like ng in singing; "ñ" like ny in canyon; "ś" and "ṣ" like sh in English, though the first is really a palatal.

In the case of aspirated letters (bh, ch, dh, gh, jh, kh, ph, th) the sound or breathing represented by the "h" must be clearly heard, e.g., "bh" is like bh in cab-horse, ch like chh in church-house; thus

"ph" and "th" are never pronounced as in English but as in top-hole and neatherd. Double consonants should be pronounced really double, as in shot-tower.

Note: In the following pages 'Hindu' is not used, as in America, to mean simply 'Indian,' but with reference to Hinduism as distinct from Buddhism, Jainism, and Muhammadanism.

THE PRINCIPAL INDIAN DEITIES REPRESENTED

HINDU

The supreme deities (Deva) represented are Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Devī. These are the names of God as worshipped by the leading sectarian groups, Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, and Śākta. Each is represented in various forms, corresponding to the necessities of the worshipper and each is known by various names.

Śiva is a god of mountains, of wild dances, and of asceticism; the matted locks, the skull and crescent moon amongst them, a third eye opening on the forehead, wreathing snakes, a trident and a drum, are amongst his characteristic attributes. He rides on the bull, Nandi. Also known as Hari, Mahādeva.

Viṣṇu is conceived rather as a great king, surrounded by the luxury of a heavenly court. He is also known as Hara, and, in his incarnations (avatārs) as Kṛṣṇa, Rāma, etc. His characteristic marks include a crown and other jewels, a garland of wild flowers, and the discus and mace as weapons. His 'vehicle' is Garuḍa, a sort of roc.

Harihara is the combination of Śiva and Viṣṇu in one person.

Devī, the goddess, also spoken of as Śakti, Energy, is

at once a supreme power in her own right, the Mother Goddess of the Universe, and at the same time represented as Umā (Pārvatī) and Lakṣmī, the visible consorts of Śiva and Viṣṇu. Like other divinities she appears both in pacific and in angry forms. Her 'vehicle' is a lion.

Other deities represented include:

Gaṇeśa, Gaṇapati, the elephant-headed son of Śiva and Pārvatī, is an embodiment of shrewd intelligence and especially invoked at the commencement of undertakings, as the 'Remover of Difficulties.' He does not appear before the Gupta period, and is always represented not only as elephant-headed but as pot-bellied (kalodarah), in which respect he is related to the Yakṣa types. His 'vehicle' is a rat.

Kārttikeya, also a son of Śiva, god of War.

Yakṣas and Yakṣīs, genii and dryads mostly inhabiting trees.

Nāgas and Nāginīs, snakes or dragons, genii of the waters.

Deified saints.

Figures of donors and ancestral portraits.

BUDDHIST AND JAINA

Buddha and Mahāvīra, the deified founders of the systems known as Buddhism and Jainism.

Bodhisattvas, or future Buddhas.

II

INDIA: Late ĀNDHRA

Amarāvatī, ca. A.D. 200

The description of objects follows their arrangement in the Gallery, beginning with the Head of Buddha in the glass case (next to doorway, east wall) and proceeding to the left (north).

21.1524

Head of Buddha

Marble. Amarāvatī, late Āndhra, about A.D. 200

The hair is as usual in small short curls covering the whole head. The cranial protuberance (uṣṇīṣa) is inconspicuous.

21.1513

Casing slab from the Amarāvatī stūpa

Marble. About A.D. 200

Worship of the Bodhi tree (Bodhidruma), representing the Buddha's Great Enlightenment (Mahāsambodhi). In accordance with the older tradition, the Buddha is represented only by symbols; here the tree, throne, and footprints. Worshippers, male and female, are offering golden vases of lotus flowers, auspicious emblems of abundance, known as punnaghata, "Vessels of Plenty." Here also the older worship of tree spirits (Yaksas, etc.) survives in Buddhism in another guise. The nyagrodha, or, as here represented, pippala tree at Uruvelā, beneath which the Buddha was seated when he obtained the Great Enlightenment, was originally the haunt of such a tree spirit.

21.1525

Fragment of a medallion from a railing upright

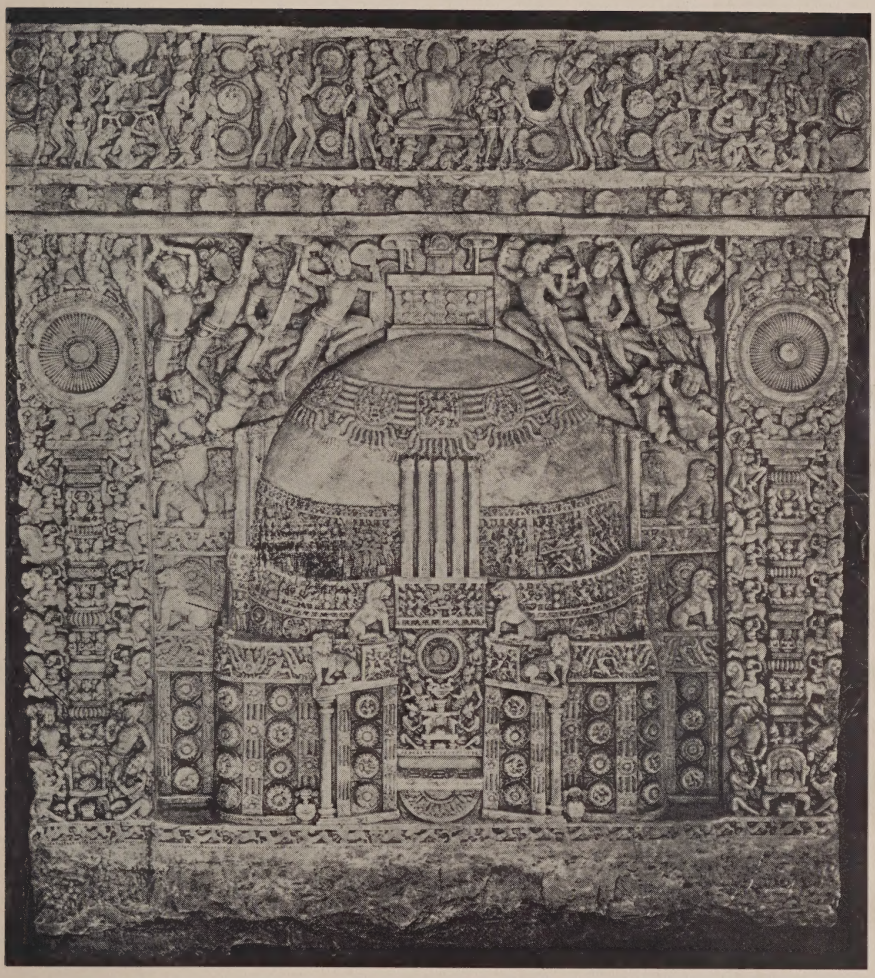
Amarāvatī

21.1529

Lower part of an upright pillar (thaba) from the Amarāvatī stūpa railing

Marble. About A.D. 200

Railings of this type (vedikā), but usually smaller and plainer, were used in early India to surround and enclose sacred objects (cetiya) such as trees, shrines, and mounds (stūpas). A majority were circular structures, enclosing a stūpa, leaving an inner space for circumambulation, and provided with one or four entrance gateways (toraṇa). The Amarāvatī railing was the largest and most elaborately decorated railing ever erected; the circumference was about 521 feet; the total height, including plinth and coping (see 21.1506, 21.1508), about 12 feet 9 inches. The illustration, reproducing one of the casing slabs, gives an idea of the appearance once presented by the whole shrine. At the base of the pillar fragment there is a horizontal band of lotus ornament, supporting a large half-lotus medallion; above this, remains of monastic figures in patchwork robes. Originally there was a central medallion with figures or lotus ornament, and at the top, below the coping, an inverted half-lotus medallion corresponding to the one preserved at the base. Above all this was the continuous coping. Sockets for the lenticular crossbars (see 21.1528) can be traced at the sides. See illustration on next page.



21.1505

Part of a casing slab from the Amarāvatī stūpa

Marble. About A.D. 200

The worship of the Dharmacakra or Wheel of the Law: representing the Buddha's Preaching of the First Sermon in the Deer Park at Benares, known as the "Turning of the Wheel of the Law." The Wheel is represented as set up on a pillar, and rests immediately on a small capital with addorsed lions. The standing figure with a fly-whisk may be a guardian Yakṣa (geni), the seated figure with hands folded, a human worshipper. Above is a flying angel with a basket of flowers in one hand, casting flowers at the Wheel.

21.1528

Lotus Medallion (cross-bar, suci)

Grey marble. From the Amarāvatī railing (vedikā), about A. D. 200

Almost the whole of the space available is occupied by the representation of an expanded rose-lotus (padma) in low relief. The two ends of the cross-bar are made lenticular in section, to fit into sockets in the sides of the upright posts.
The rose-lotus is the floral decorative motif most frequently made use of in Indian decorative art. The lotus has at times a variety of specific meanings: it is held in the hand by many deities, is a favorite ritual offering, symbolizes detachment and purity (for its petals rest on the water but are not wetted and, springing from the mud, are nevertheless immaculate), abundance (in special connection with the goddess of prosperity and beauty, Śrī or Laksmī), or serving as a seat, pedestal, or footstool, it is a symbol of divinity (the feet of the gods do not touch the earth). The outer petals provide an architectural ornament of which the well-known classical 'egg and dart' is a less naturalistic form. In literature, the lotus is a common term of comparison for anything lovely or lovable, such as the eyes, face, or feet of a divine or beautiful person. In the present use of the lotus as a decorative motif these ideas are undoubtedly implicit rather than explicit.

21.1507

The Worship of the Dharmacakra, or Wheel of the Law (see 21.1505). Part of a casing slab from the Amarāvatī stūpa

Marble. About A.D. 200

Below is the head of a human worshipper, the rest missing. Above is a flying angel with a tray of flowers, casting flowers at the wheel. Along the upper edge is a band of running animals.

21.1506 and 21.1508

Two portions of the coping (uṣṇīṣa) of the railing of the Amarāvatī stūpa

Marble. About A.D. 200

The coping is ornamented with a frieze of Yaksas bearing a heavy floral garland, which proceeds from the open mouth of a makara, seen on the lower right-hand side. In the upper curve of the left-hand fragment is seen a representation of the worship of the Dharmacakra (see Nos. 21.1505 and 21.1507).

The makara (fish-tailed crocodile) is a symbol of water, in which is the origin of life, hence all vegetation and creatures are represented as drawn out of its mouth. See also the band of lotus ornament on No. 21.1529, springing from the open mouth of a makara. In Nos. 27.447 and 26.26, the makara vehicle of the tree spirit has a similar significance.

21.1510

Fragment, probably from a railing upright

Marble. Amarāvatī

A woman playing a lute (vīnā). The various musical instruments represented in early Indian art include a harp, a lute (of the type here illustrated, probably a prototype of the Japanese biwa), a flute, cymbals, sticks (or 'bones'), and several kinds of drums. The Nātya Sāstra, perhaps two centuries later than the present relief, lists a great variety of these instruments.

III

INDIA: KUṢĀNA

Mathurā, ca. A.D. 50-320

26.32 and 27.447

Two railing pillars

Sandstone. Mathurā, about A.D. 100

Each pillar bears, reverse, lotus rosettes, and obverse (exhibited), a female figure standing under a tree and, in the case of the complete figure, supported by a makara (mythical crocodile). Such figures are commonly found on the railing pillars and gateways of early Buddhist and Jaina shrines; they represent popular divinities (Devatās), amongst whom the Yakṣīs or dryads inhabiting trees were regarded as genii of prosperity, fertility, and love. Later, related types placed in pairs at temple entrances have been regarded as river goddesses (see 26.26), but there is no sufficient evidence for this change in significance before the late Gupta period. For Buddhist railings and railing pillars, see the description of those from Amarāvatī. Slots for the horizontal cross-bars will be seen at the sides of the pillars. (For examples of such cross-bars of the same period see Case 21 in Indian Room I.)

25.437

Seated image of Buddha

Sandstone. Mathurā, about the beginning of the second century A.D.

An example of the first Mathurā type, probably the first Buddha type in use. The right hand is raised in the gesture of assurance, the left clenched and resting on the thigh, the elbow extended. The head is smooth; the tonsured remnant of the central lock on the summit of the head, originally represented as a small spiral coil, has been lost. At this time there was no uṣṇīṣa in the sense of a cranial protuberance. The whole expression is far more energetic than in later images. The drapery, covering the left shoulder only, shows schematic folds. The Buddha is represented as seated on a lion throne; behind the head, remains of a circular nimbus with the usual scalloped pattern around the edge; on either side of the Buddha attendant figures, on the left probably the Yakṣa (later Bodhisattva) Vajrapāṇi, on the right, with the fly-whisk, not identified.

17.3120

Head of Buddha

Sandstone. Mathurā, about A.D. 100-125

A typical Buddha head of the vigorous, full-faced early Mathurā type of the old Indian school without Hellenistic influence. The head is altogether similar to that of Friar Bala's "Bodhisattva" statue made in Mathurā and set up in Sārnāth in the third year of Kaniṣka (A.D. 123). The short spiral hair lock on the crown of the head is broken away.

IV

INDIA: GUPTA

4th-6th century A.D.

21.2230

Head of Buddha

Mottled red sandstone. Mathurā, 5th century A.D.

A typical Gupta work. As compared with 17.3120 there is greater definition and accomplishment, but less plastic vitality. The uṣṇīsa is now developed as a distinct cranial protuberance; and together with the rest of the head, is covered with small short curls turning to the right. It may be explained that according to the legend of the Buddha's tonsure, in which his turban and long hair were removed together with one stroke of the sword, the remaining hair, two inches in length, curled lightly to the right, and so remained throughout his life. Apparently, this was at first understood to mean that the short lock remaining formed one spiral twist; later, that the short hair remaining formed numerous distinct curls. As to the uṣṇīsa, there is no evidence that it was understood as a cranial protuberance before the middle Kuṣāna period, and before that time the word must be explained in accordance with its original significance, as a turban. The long ears of the Buddha have no symbolic significance; drawn down by the weight of the earrings worn when a prince, they so remained when his royal ornaments were abandoned on adopting the ascetic life.

17.1015

Viṣṇu

Mottled red sandstone. Mathurā, 6th century

This three-headed type (on the left a lion, on the right a boar) is related to that of Marīcī, the Dawn; the three heads may have reference to the sun, rising, at noon, and setting. The type is more commonly met with in the ninth century in Kashmir, but a Gandhāran example, which cannot be later than the fourth century, is known.

Beside the elaborate crown and usual jewelry, the deity wears a plaited sacred thread and a long garland (vana malā).

26.1

The upper half of a statue of a king or Bodhisattva

Mottled red sandstone. Mathurā, fifth century

As sculpture, entirely comparable with 21.2430 and 17.1015, and like the latter, in royal costume with elaborate crown and hair falling to the shoulders in ringlets. The features are full, the eyes heavy lidded. The general treatment is still massive and sculpturesque, but the surface modelling is more sensitive than in the Kusāna period (25.437, etc.).

26.26

Yakṣī

Sandstone. Besnagar, North India, 5th century A.D.

The relief originally formed the angle ornament on one side of the doorway jamb of a Hindu or possible Buddhist shrine. The divinity stands on a makara (crocodile) vehicle, beneath an aśoka-tree and is accompanied by playful dwarf attendants. It will be seen that the iconographic type is the same as that of the earlier railing pillar figure from Mathurā (north wall, east side). In Gupta and Mediaeval Indian art it has been customary to regard all door-jamb figures with makara or tortoise vehicles as representing river goddesses, those with the makara, including the present example, as representing the Ganges (Gaṅgā Devī); but here it is probable that the development has not yet taken place, for there is nothing to distinguish the type from that of Nos. 27.447 and 26.32.

25.465

Architectural fragment (lintel) of a Buddhist Temple
Sandstone. North Central India, Gupta, about A.D. 500

The design embodies a double cornice. At the upper left is represented the preaching of the First Sermon in the Deer Park at Benares; here the Buddha with hands in the teaching pose is seated in the centre, with the five first disciples seated to right and left; standing right and left, are two Bodhisattvas, Padmapāṇi and perhaps Maitreya, both with fly-whisks; in the corners are flying angels with flowers and garlands; in the foreground, two deer, marking the scene of the event. The same event is represented again on the right-hand side; above, the Buddha as before; in the middle, the five disciples; below, the two deer with the Wheel of the Law. According to the older Indian methods of representation the last item, the deer and the Wheel, would alone have sufficed to portray the event.

On the upper cornice, left, is a 'caitya-window' motif enclosing a kīrttimukha head; below this, on the lower cornice, a kinnara or bird-man.

25.442

Ganeśa with Śakti

Sandstone, late Gupta, 6th century A.D.

Ganeśa, "Lord of (Śiva's) hordes," does not appear in Indian art or literature much before the Gupta period, but is then and later widely worshipped as a deity who removes difficulties and as a god of shrewd intelligence and protector of learning. Various curious legends explain his peculiar appearance, particularly the elephant's head and the one broken tusk. Iconographically and particularly in respect of the characteristically protuberant belly, whence the epithet "Lambodara," the deity is closely related to the Yakṣa types. He may well have been an aboriginal and popular god admitted to the Brahmanical pantheon at a late date. In the sculpture he is accompanied by his Śakti, represented as his wife, seated on his thigh; she holds a bowl from which he is eating sweetmeats.

V

INDIA: MEDIAEVAL

Northern India, 7th-12th century

21.1070

Mahāvīra

Sandstone. Bundelkhand, North Central India, 8th or 9th century A.D.

Mahāvīra, the twenty-fourth Jina (Conqueror) or Tīrthaṁkara (Finder of the Ford), and founder of historic Jainism, contemporary of the Buddha. Above the figure of the deified saint, whose hair is dressed in ascetic fashion (jaṭā mukuṭa) is a triple umbrella (chatra) and behind this the tree of enlightenment. Right and left are flying angels in clouds, with floral offerings. The remains of a throne-back with lion brackets show that the figure was originally seated, no doubt in the usual yogī position. The sculpture preserves many of the fine qualities of the Gupta style.

21.1720

Umā-Maheśvara group (Śiva and Pārvatī)

Sandstone. Northern Indian, 8th century

This is a complete family group of the usual type. Śiva and Pārvatī are conversing, he probably relating a story at her request. The god is four-armed; the upper left holds a bow, the lower left embraces Pārvatī, the others cannot be deciphered. His hair is dressed in ascetic fashion (jāṭā mukuṭa); but for the vest, normal royal costume is worn.

22.381

Padmapāṇi

Black slate. Bihar or Bengal, late Pāla, 11th or 12th century

The Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is otherwise known as Padmapāṇi, from the rose-lotus (padma) held as an attribute in his hand. He is here represented as seated in an easy pose (lalitāsana); the left hand held the stem of the lotus seen above the left shoulder, the right hand was probably raised in the gesture of giving assurance (abhaya mudrā). The hair is dressed high on the head in ascetic fashion, as in Śiva images, but a tiara (uṣnīṣa bhuṣaṇa) is also worn. The usual costume and jewelry of a king appear; the jewelled sacred thread (yajñopavītā) will be remarked. The seat is an expanded lotus (padmāsana). The face is damaged. The sculpture is a good example of the very accomplished but rather mechanical style of late Pāla art.

24.153

Eight Great Events in the Life of the Buddha

Black stone. Bihar or Bengal, Pāla period, 10th or 11th century

In the centre (1) in a trifoliate niche, the Buddha is seated with the right hand touching the ground (bhūmisparśa mudrā), "Calling the earth to witness" to his right to occupy the throne of wisdom on the occasion of the Great Enlightenment. The Buddha belongs to the exceptional crowned type. On a smaller scale, beginning at the lower left-hand side of the actual figure, are (2) the Nativity, viz. the Mother of Buddha standing under the sāl-tree in the Lumbinī garden, (3) the Descent from the Tusita heavens, (4) Great Miracle at Śrāvastī; at the top (5) the Parinirvāṇa; proper left, at the top, (6) First Sermon, (7) Taming of the maddened elephant Nalagiri, (8) the monkey's offering. The scenes are much abbreviated. (For further details see M.F.A. Bulletin No. 132.)

25.138

Vishnu

Sandstone. North Central India (Bundelkhand), about A.D. 1000

The figure is four-armed, but the hands with the attributes are missing. The identification depends on the general type (royal costume, crown, etc.) and the śrīvatsa symbol on the chest. The stone employed is excessively hard, and this accounts for the perfect preservation of all the details of the elaborately realised jewelry. For comparison, see the ajouré relief of Harihara in Room 1, Case 18.

VI

FARTHER INDIA and INDONESIA: CLASSIC

Cambodia and Java, 9th-13th century

Loan

Head of a deity, Buddhist or Hindu

Basalt. Javanese, 9th century, perhaps from Prambānam. Lent by Dr. Denman W. Ross

17.1014

Durgā-Mahiṣamardinī; the goddess Durgā or Caṇḍī slaying the buffalo-demon Mahiṣa

Basalt. Java, probably from Singasari, 13th century

Durgā, also known as Caṇḍī, and by other names, is a form of the supreme Goddess (Devī), also regarded as especially the consort and 'Energy' of Śiva. She is here eight-armed and carries weapons, amongst which the discus, sword, and conch can be recognized. She stands on the prostrate buffalo; the demon has emerged from its throat in the form of a dwarf, and in this form receives the coup de grâce.

The story is related in the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa and other texts. Gods and demons had been at war for a hundred years, the demons winning. Then the Great Goddess who existed as Energy in all the gods, emerged from them in one person, and receiving from them their weapons and jewels defeated the demon army and slew their chief, Mahiṣa.

Deva balustrade, Aṅkor Thoṁ gateways

24.8 and 24.412

Two heads of Devas

Sandstone. Aṅkor Thoṁ, Cambodian early 10th century

Almost certainly from the series of Devas and Asuras supporting a Nāga forming a balustrade on each side of the causeways crossing the moat at the five gateways of the city of Aṅkor Thoṁ.

26.13

Head of Vishnu

Grey sandstone. Cambodian, classic, about 11th century

Apparently a portrait head of a king, but in Khmer art innumerable posthumous portraits of deified kings were set up in the form of the deity worshipped by the deceased and are thus indistinguishable from images of the deity. It is very probable that in the present case we have to do with a head of Vishnu, or at any rate that of a king identified after death with that deity.

23.445

Architectural fragment with the figure of a devatā

Sandstone. Cambodian, classic, 10th or 11th century A.D.

Similar figures of devatās are highly characteristic of the decoration of the walls of the courts

Devatās: inner court of Arkor Wāt and galleries of Cambodian temples in the classic period. The Cambodian poet Feng, in his Preah Ket Melea, has written enthusiastically of their beauty.

24.420

Head of Buddha

Basalt. Borobuḍur, Java

A typical Javanese work of the Śailendra period, from the great Caṇḍi Borobuḍur, the most imposing monument in Central Java. The summit of this pyramidal structure is covered with a series of hollow, perforated stūpas, each of which enshrines a seated Buddha, and it is from one of these that the head is most likely derived.

Caṇḍi Borobuḍur, stūpas on the upper terrace